

Random Encounters

The Cult of Tharizdun

By Darrin Drader



Temple Sites

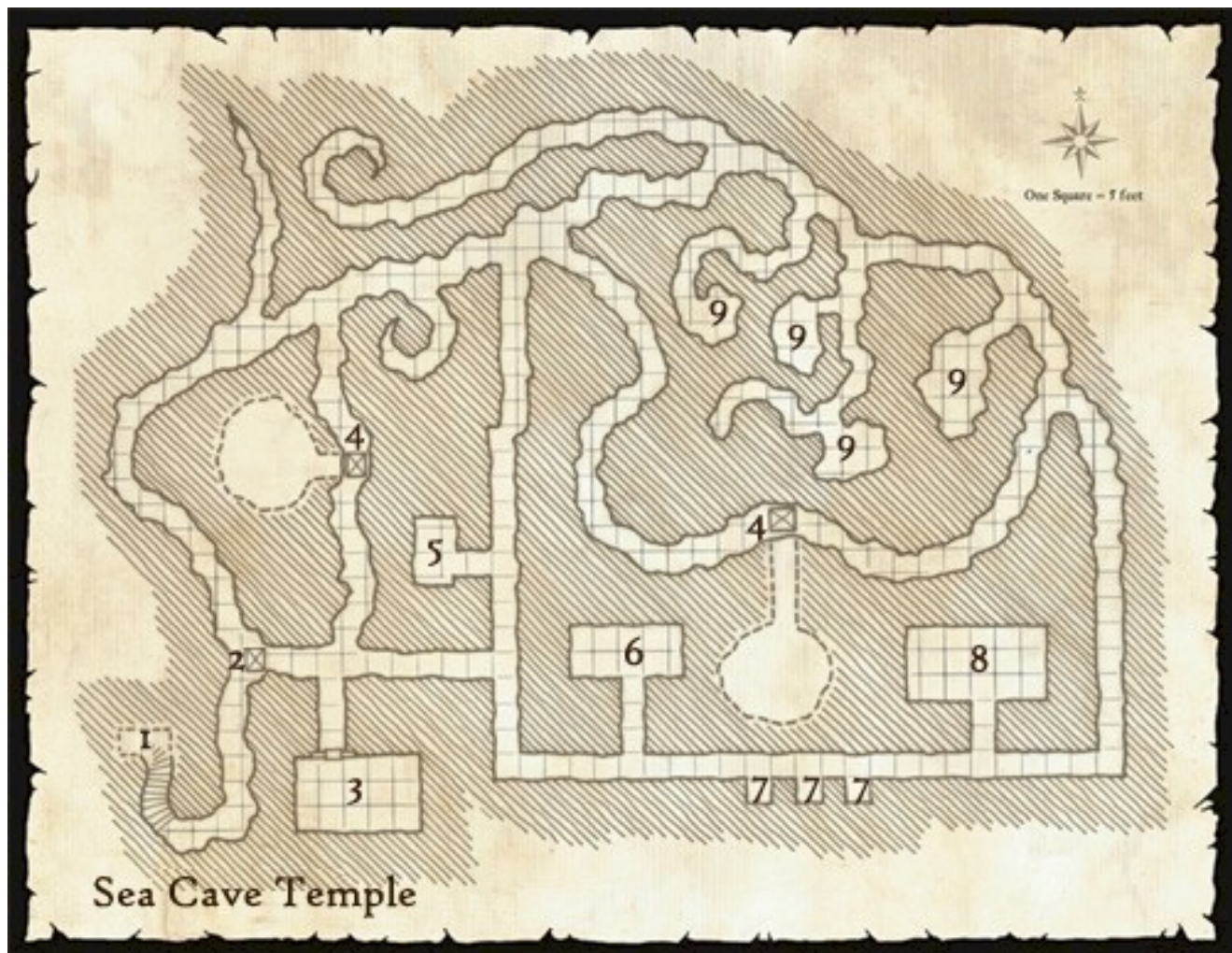
"Light must be snuffed, perfection decayed, order dissolved, and minds fragmented." The mantra of the cult of Tharizdun, these words are often found etched into the altars, the stone pillars, and the doors within the Tharizdun's temples. These dark places are crushingly void of hope, and its followers revel in the darkness and despair that all things almost certainly face at some time in their existence. Though their lord is currently locked away in a planar prison, the congregations praise the fact that even the most optimistic sages agree that in time everything that exists will one day pass into dust and nothingness. Tharizdun will win the battle, despite the opposition of all the gods.

Each temple is led by one of the witnesses of Tharizdun, who are vile cultists who have risen to their positions through ambition, charm, and manipulation (see Part 4). The worshipers often reside at the temple site in opulent chambers, surrounded by riches donated to them by their body of worshipers. Despite their message of eminent decay, they partake of the finest things life has to offer. Rich food, rare tapestries, gold, and often harems are kept by the witness in charge of a temple. While the head of a temple indulges in these lavish surroundings, the cult uses these very things as a means of recruiting new followers to the temple. Those who are disenfranchised by society find not only acceptance, but luxury in these surroundings.

Temple sites must be hidden from the local populace. Nearly all people of the Flanaess have a hatred toward the cult of Tharizdun. This hatred, sponsored by the gods themselves, force the cult into hiding. They exist in the shadows, often transforming abandoned buildings into temples. They have also been known to take control of ill-used and forgotten chambers in sewer systems beneath cities. Occasionally their temples exist in basements or cellars beneath houses belonging to respectable people who have converted.

In the wilderness regions, the cult can afford to operate somewhat more openly. Structures exist in wooded depths and rocky plains where the followers of a region can meet and perform their dark rituals. The locals may believe that there is a darkness hanging over the region, but as long as no harm comes to them, the cult's activities are rarely investigated.

While the outside of a temple to Tharizdun normally doesn't betray the nature of its malign denizens, the interior must serve as a place of worship as well as a defensive location where the inhabitants can defend themselves from those who would try to destroy them. Doorways are usually trapped in such a way that only someone within can disarm them to allow others entrance. Hallways are often lined with murder holes, rooms are constructed with a dais so that warriors can gain the advantage of higher ground. Guard rooms are placed throughout the temple and manned by either the worshipers of Tharizdun or elhoriads. Ceremony chambers, the private rooms belonging to the high priests are located deep within the temple. Many temples also have a permanent portal to another plane established so that they can quickly flee to another realm where good creatures are much less likely to follow.



A Sample Temple

By using one of the maps from the [Map-A-Week feature](#), you can either start playing right away or get an idea of how to lay out your own temple. The map chosen as a sample here represents a hidden temple that lurks along a seacoast. You may want to add a few other sea-going beasts to it to provide a nice local flavor to the perils your PCs will face! This sample represents a temple that is in the process of building itself into something more stable and permanent (inasmuch as Tharizdun's followers want stability). As a result, some of the rooms are not quite furnished to the taste of the witness in charge of the temple. Also, only blighters, a witness (Samiela), and elhoriads reside in these caves at present. Samiela's goal is to destroy the local fishing industry, so there should be at least one town whose industry is based on fish within a day or so of the caves. While she's doing this, she hopes to start recruiting new worshipers from nearby. Lack of fish can lead to despair among those whose livelihoods depend on the fish harvest, after all. (If the DM wishes, she may also have a deeper motive of seeking out a *net of despair* lost to the worshipers of Tharizdun in a shipwreck somewhere nearby.)

Outside Environs

The cliffs near the sea cave have a cleverly hidden path leading upward. The beach itself is barely a strip of sand at high tide, though low tide exposes a fair amount of bracken-strewn sand. Both the land above and the beach serve as areas for the blighters inside the temple to go out and find plenty of nature to destroy with their innate abilities. At any moment, 1d4 blighters may be outside the temple. (Use the statistics

presented in Part 1 of this series.) Another nearby cave (not shown on map) has a few hidden canoes and a small ship owned by Samiela and crewed by the blighters she brought with her (replace the blighters' Listen skills with Profession [sailor]).

1. Entrance: At least two elhoriads (see Part 2) lurk just within the entrance to the temple.

Elhoriads (2): hp 32; see Part 2.

2. Trap: The area has a spiked pit trap. The DM can choose to add a few elhoriads at the bottom of this pit.

Spiked Pit Trap: CR 3; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Reflex save (DC 14) avoids; 10 ft. deep (1d6, fall); pit spikes (Atk +10 melee, 3d6 damage); Search (DC 15); Disable Device (DC 30). *Market Price:* 5,700 gp.

3. Outer Temple: The ceremonies for this hidden temple take place within this room. Four elhoriads stand guard within, and a ghost of a former seagoing fighter (a former pirate) wanders the area. There is usually one blighter here, as well (90% chance of her being present).

Elhoriads (4): hp 32; see Part 2.

Ghost: hp 32; see *Monster Manual*, page 117.

4. Sea Cat Lair Trapdoor: A trapdoor here opens into a water-filled pit that has a sea cat living in it part of the time (50% chance of it being present). The pit has an exit to the sea, and the tide brings in more water at various parts of the day. (The normal water depth is about 10 feet deep, but it can fluctuate between 15 feet deep and 5 feet deep.) One part of the wall forms a lip that is available only when the water depth is 10 feet or less. Samiela has plans to make these creatures into undead of some sort in the future.

Camouflaged Watery Pit Trap: CR 5; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Reflex save (DC 20) avoids; 25 ft. deep (2d6, fall); multiple targets (first target in each of two adjacent 5-ft. squares); Search (DC 25); Disable Device (DC 317). *Market Price:* 8,500 gp.

Sea Cat: hp 51; see *Monster Manual*, page 220.

5. Witness Chamber: The temple's witness of Tharizdun resides in a room beyond a black velvet curtain. A rich bear-fur rug is spread out over a sleigh bed. Two chests made of dark-stained oak rest at the far end of the room. A dark wardrobe stands opposite the bed, and a full-length silver mirror hangs on the wall to the left of the doorway. Despite the overriding scent of salty water, a pleasing aroma drifts from a censer hanging next to the bed. While the PCs can find several sets of rich priestly vestments and some very nice outfits, not much else of importance is in this room -- unless the DM wishes it to be.

Samiela, Witness of Tharizdun: hp 110; see Part 4.

6. Eating Chamber: A couple of round wooden tables are grouped in this room, and a cooking area, complete with brick oven and vent, is on the far end of the room. (The vent branches into several other smaller crevices, which helps disperse the cooking smoke in a less visible manner.) Two blighters are usually in this room taking a break.

Blighters (2): 76 hp; see Part 1.

7. Privies: The priests have added wooden seating to what used to be little more than holes in the ground. A censer filled with fragrant incense hangs outside each entrance.

8. Meeting Room: The temple's witness has set up this room as a meeting room. Though the room has a few wooden chairs, these seats serve only to make the room look emptier. Four elhoriads are stationed here.

Elhoriads (4): hp 32; see Part 2.

9. Temporary Storage and Sleeping Areas: These rooms contain crates of food and other necessities, as well as several simple beds. There are usually 2d4 blighters in the area.

Blighters (2d4): 76 hp; see Part 1.

Bringing the Parts Together

The ultimate challenge a party faces with regards to the forces of Tharizdun should be its location of strength: the temple itself. Uncovering and destroying a temple site can be the focus of an entire campaign. Once here, they face a number of deadly obstacles, ranging from fanatic followers who view their own deaths as progress toward their ultimate goal to traps, undead creatures unknown to the outside world, and powerful priests intent on preserving not only their decadent lifestyle as well as their following. If the party succeeds in destroying the temple but fails to eliminate the high priest, chances are that the temple will arise at a later point in time, even stronger than it is now.

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